

American

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President Obama Adapts New Foreign Policy During First Year in White House	1
Secretary Clinton on Terrorist Attack in Pakistan.....	2
Arms Control: Key Issue Between Washington, Moscow	2
Federal Reserve Head Seeks Better Regulation of Financial System.....	3
Statement on Detention of Human Rights Activists in Russia	4

President Obama Adapts New Foreign Policy During First Year in White House

Foreign affairs specialists cite cooperation over confrontation

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Staff Writer

Washington — In his first year in office, President Obama tackled an impressive array of foreign policy challenges, adapting a response focusing more on cooperation than confrontation, say foreign affairs specialists.

Threats to world peace ranging from nuclear proliferation to war in Afghanistan are being handled “remarkably well” by Obama, says Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser from 1977 to 1981.

Brzezinski, who managed tough challenges for the Carter White House like the 1979 Iran hostage crisis and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that President Obama has “redefined the U.S. view of the world” outside the boundaries of the war on terrorism and “reconnected the United States with the emerging historical context of the twenty-first century.”

Obama defined the new context as inclusion, cooperation and what diplomats call multilateralism in his first major foreign policy speech in Prague in April. Citing nuclear nonproliferation as a top priority, he said we live in a more “interconnected world,” in which global threats to peace “demand that we listen to one another and work together; that we focus on our common interests, not on occasional differences.”

Multilateralism is a move in the right direction, says Ambassador Rust Deming, a retired Foreign Service officer who served as a senior adviser in the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Deming now teaches Japanese studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.

“One of the most important things the president has done,” Deming told *America.gov*, is “to reshape the tone of American foreign policy by emphasizing the fact that we need the cooperation of other countries and we need to use international institutions, including the U.N. I think he’s done that very effectively by things like speaking at the U.N. and presiding at a meeting of the U.N. Security Council, and I hope that continues.”

Deming said his main concern was the Obama administration’s lagging emphasis on trade. “The Asian region is very interested in expanding world trade. However, moving forward with free trade agreements

with South Korea and other countries has not been perceived to be a high priority of this administration. Obama is off to a great start, but words need to be followed by concrete deeds in opening markets, and I look forward to that in the years ahead,” he said.

On the political front, the Obama administration differs from that of his predecessor in “where you think conflict comes from in the world,” says Alex Weisiger, assistant professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, where he specializes in decisions relating to the use of force. Weisiger spoke recently on a panel sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania’s political science department that assessed Obama’s first year in office.

Obama, says Weisiger, takes less of an ideological approach to problems than did the Bush administration. “He seems more concerned about allaying concerns of potential opponents” than categorizing them in groups of good or bad. For example, he “has been more willing to alleviate Russian concerns ... by pulling the missile shield in Eastern Europe that the Russians were worried about.”

But as commander in chief of the U.S. armed forces, Obama has also shown mettle in helping the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan battle extremist insurgencies, the scholar said.

While Obama’s recent decision to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan may have surprised some members of his own party who oppose further U.S. involvement, according to Weisiger, it was quickly matched by a European commitment of 7,000 additional troops. This illustrates Obama’s less confrontational and ideological approach to foreign affairs, he said.

In the long run, this cooperative tack may strengthen some of the alliances and goodwill toward the United States that are needed to maintain global leadership, the scholar said.

But pulling the missile defense from Europe may not be such a smart idea, says Kim Holmes, former assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs under President George W. Bush. Holmes, who is now a vice president of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative policy research group, told *America.gov* that cancelling the U.S.-sponsored system of missile defense stationed in Eastern Europe was “a serious mistake on all levels, including our own security.”

Holmes said removing the missile interceptors and radar “put the United States as well as Europe at risk from a long-range Iranian [missile] threat” and also “signaled the Russians that they get concessions like this with nothing in return.”

Though Holmes sees Obama's first year of foreign policy efforts as "overrated," he said, "I'm at least partly happy about what he did about Afghanistan. I wish he had not taken so long to make up his mind, and frankly I wish he had provided more troops and I don't like the idea of a timetable."

In a December 1 speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Obama pledged a build-up to around 100,000 U.S. troops for the conflict in Afghanistan, adding that he would begin bringing them home in 18 months.

Holmes said signaling a withdrawal may limit Obama's policy options in Afghanistan. "I think a timetable will make it hard for him because in a year's time he probably will find [the war is] not improving as much as he would like and he will have to make even harder decisions" about whether to continue supporting the Afghans militarily.

Differing with Holmes and offering a European perspective, Dieter Dettke, a German-born adjunct professor in international relations at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, commended Obama for a better working relationship with America's NATO partners, including Germany.

Dettke told *America.gov* most Germans and Europeans believe Obama has had a positive influence in world affairs due in large part to "his cooperative approach to international relations and to other countries."

This is especially apparent in the war in Afghanistan, Dettke said. "The Obama administration has wrapped its arms around the complexity of the war and discussed its intricacies with NATO in a way the previous administration did not, making it easier for NATO governments and publics to support the [7,000] troop escalation."

Because of Obama's multilateral approach, Dettke said, "I'm cautiously optimistic that the allies will come around and chip in more troops to Afghanistan, at least for the short term."

At the same time, Europeans do not view all foreign affairs against the backdrop of the war on terror, Dettke emphasized. "We don't want a clash of civilizations, and Obama understands this as displayed in his June 4 speech in Cairo reassuring the Muslim world of America's friendship."

Obama's positive approach to other countries and emphasis on multilateralism has "really changed public opinion more favorably toward America and that is one reason his approval rating is between 88-90 percent in Germany," Dettke said.

Secretary Clinton on Terrorist Attack in Pakistan

United States strongly condemns attack, offers condolences

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

For Immediate Release

January 1, 2010

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Terrorist Attack in Pakistan

The United States strongly condemns today's terrorist attack on civilians in Pakistan, and we offer our condolences to the families of the victims and all the people of Pakistan. The Pakistani people have seen terrorists target schools, markets, mosques, and now a volleyball game. The United States will continue to stand with the people of Pakistan in their efforts to chart their own future free from fear and intimidation, and will support their efforts to combat violent extremism and bolster democracy.

Arms Control: Key Issue Between Washington, Moscow

By Andre de Nesnera

VOA News

Many analysts agree that during the eight years of the Bush administration, U.S.-Russia relations steadily deteriorated. And experts wondered whether President Obama would reverse that downward trend.

Only weeks after Obama was inaugurated, Vice President Joe Biden answered that question in a speech to an international security conference in Munich, Germany.

"To paraphrase President Obama, it's time to press the reset button," he said. "And to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia."

Experts say that speech set a new, positive tone for relations between Washington and Moscow.

Former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft describes the current relationship as "prickly, but improving."

"The whole notion, the 'reset button,' is psychologically the right thing to do," he said. "Our relationship has been increasingly souring for a number of years now and it's important to turn it around. And I think we're on the verge now."

The two sides are working on a follow-on agreement to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START 1,

which expired on December 5. But both sides say they will abide by the treaty provisions until a new accord is reached.

At a July summit in Moscow, President Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitri Medvedev, agreed on the basic terms of a new treaty. They said they will reduce their countries' arsenals of strategic nuclear warheads as well as delivery systems, such as missiles and long-range bombers.

The START 1 treaty also has strict verification provisions that many experts say must be included in any follow-on accord.

One of those experts is former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger.

"The real question is the details," he said. "As you know, to this point, the START treaty has included verification of, in particular, what the Russians have been doing with regard to their offensive forces and their production complex. And we certainly are interested in seeing a continuation of the verification process."

Many experts say Moscow wants to have less intrusive verification procedures put into the follow-on to the START 1 treaty, while Washington wants stronger measures.

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger says the Russians are tough bargainers.

"On the nuclear issues that have bedeviled us in the past, the Russians have, I gather, recently toughened their stance on some of those questions," he said.

"And under those circumstances, well, in fact this administration, this regime — because it's so anxious to work a relationship with the Russians — may in fact make some compromises that I think would be very unwise," he added.

Those compromises, says Eagleburger, could be in the form of lax verification provisions.

But other experts say that because any treaty must be ratified by the U.S. Senate, every provision will be scrutinized very carefully — especially the one dealing with verification. The treaty must also be ratified by the Russian parliament, or Duma. But analysts say that is a foregone conclusion.

Federal Reserve Head Seeks Better Regulation of Financial System

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A general increase in interest rates would not have been as effective at preventing the recent economic recession as better financial regulation would have been, Federal Reserve Chairman Benjamin Bernanke says.

"Although forceful responses by policymakers around the world avoided an utter collapse of the global financial system in the fall of 2008, the crisis was nevertheless sufficiently intense to spark a deep global recession from which we are only now beginning to recover," Bernanke said in a January 3 speech to the American Economic Association's annual meeting in Atlanta.

"The crisis revealed not only weaknesses in regulators' oversight of financial institutions, but also, more fundamentally, important gaps in the architecture of financial regulation around the world," the nation's chief banker said.

During 2009 summits in London and Pittsburgh, leaders of the Group of 20 advanced and emerging economies called for greater regulation and supervision of the financial, banking and investment sectors of the global economy. The U.S. Congress is considering legislation aimed at overhauling financial regulation in the United States.

Bernanke told economists at the gathering that the Federal Reserve has been working to spot problems and to strengthen supervisory policies and practices. The Fed has also advocated substantial legislative and regulatory reforms to address those problems that were exposed by the economic crisis.

Some critics of the Fed have claimed that excessively easy monetary policy and low interest rates in the first half of the decade helped cause a rapid increase in house prices in the United States. The collapse of those prices proved a major source of the financial and economic crisis of the past two years. Bernanke said those who support that criticism have called for a greater role in monetary policy for preventing and controlling bubbles in house prices and other financial assets.

By contrast, Bernanke said, other critics have argued that monetary policy and lower interest rates were appropriate for economic conditions at the time in spurring job creation and getting the economy back to full capacity. The economic policies of the Fed were not the principal cause of the housing bubble or necessarily the tool for controlling the increase in house prices, he said.

"Stronger regulation and supervision aimed at problems with underwriting practices and lenders' risk management would have been a more effective and surgical approach to constraining the housing bubble than a general increase in interest rates," Bernanke told the economists. "The Federal Reserve and other agencies did make efforts to address poor mortgage-underwriting practices."

Links between low interest rates and the rapid rise of house prices are weak, he said.

"The lesson I take from this experience is not that financial regulation and supervision are ineffective for controlling emerging risks, but that their execution must be better and smarter," Bernanke said.

Bernanke is awaiting a vote by the U.S. Senate on his nomination by President Obama for a second term as chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve. His nomination was approved by the Senate Banking Committee in December 2009, and his reconfirmation by the full Senate is expected before his term ends January 31.

The Fed is working to improve its ability to spot and correct problems in financial institutions, and also to move from a bank-by-bank supervisory approach to one that aims for stability of the financial system as a whole, he said.

"Toward that end, we are supplementing reviews of individual firms with comparative evaluations across firms and with analyses of the interactions among firms and markets," Bernanke said.

Bernanke said speculative excesses like the housing bubble are not easy to spot in their earliest stages, and applying higher interest rates to quash them can have unintended consequences for the economy as a whole. Part of the problem with house price bubbles is in determining with certainty if they are national in scope or confined to a few rapidly growing local markets, he added.

"Monetary policy is also a blunt tool, and interest rate increases in 2003 or 2004 sufficient to constrain the bubble could have seriously weakened the economy at just the time when the recovery from the previous recession was becoming established," Bernanke said.

"That said, having experienced the damage that asset price bubbles can cause, we must be especially vigilant in ensuring that the recent experiences are not repeated," he said.

The Federal Reserve's Federal Open Market Committee meets later this month and is expected to keep its basic

bank-lending interest rate at a record low, near zero.

Statement on Detention of Human Rights Activists in Russia

United States expresses dismay at reports of mistreatment by authorities

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 31, 2009

Statement by National Security Council Spokesman Mike Hammer on the detention of human rights activists in Russia

The United States expresses dismay at reports that authorities in Moscow prevented Russian citizens from exercising their right to assemble peacefully. In particular, the United States notes with concern the detention of protestors, including prominent human rights defender Lyudmila Alekseyeva, and reports of their mistreatment by authorities while in custody. Freedom of speech and assembly are universal rights that all governments should recognize and defend. The United States stands with those dedicated to promoting these human rights.

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